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A 30 Minute Christmas Play

What Christmas Did For JERUSHA GRUMBLE

BY

JOHN D. MACDONALD

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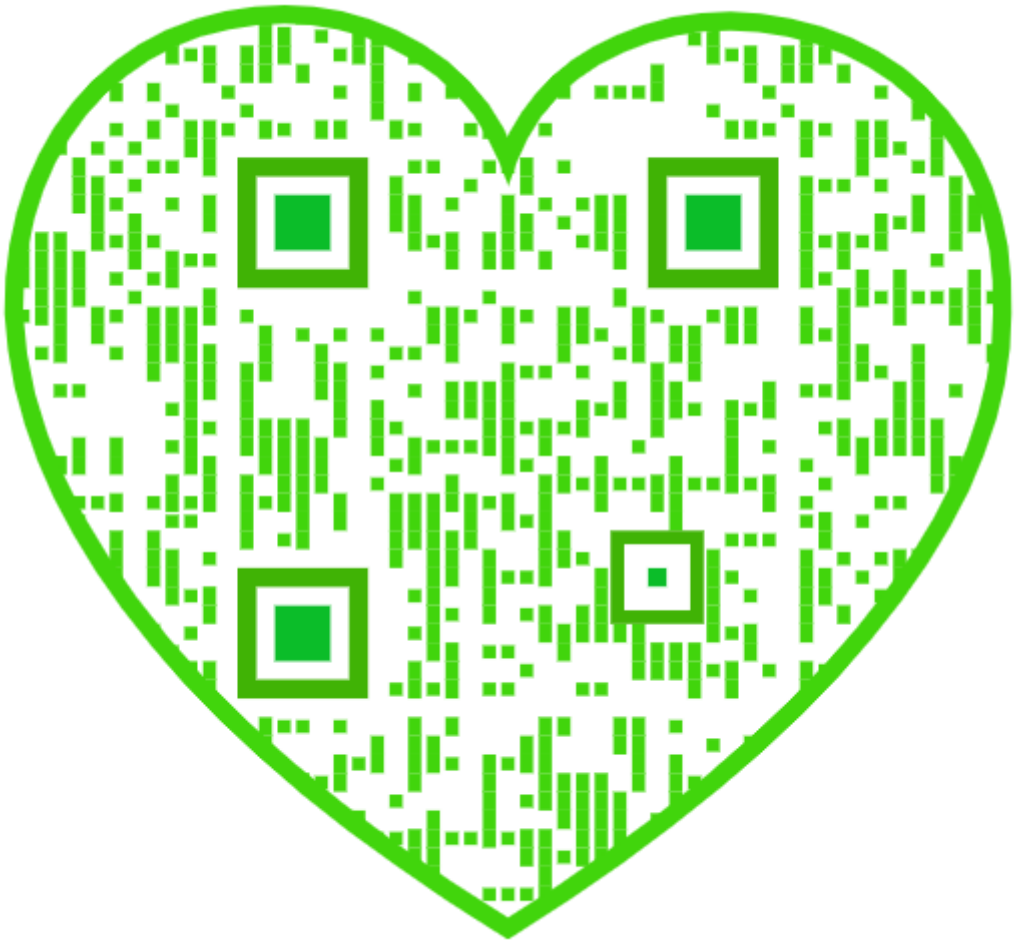

What Christmas Did for Jerusha Grumble

By

JOHN D. MACDONALD

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Requisites

TIME—*About 30 minutes*

CHARACTERS—*Isabel, Hazel, Julia, Jessie, Jerusha*

(Or it might be better if all used their own names except Jerusha.)

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What Christmas did for Jerusha Grumble

A Play for Five Girls

Scene—*A sitting-room at Isabel's home*

Isabel (Isabel, Julia, Hazel busy with Christmas gifts). I suppose, Julia, you have finished all the Christmas presents that you intend to make this year. You certainly have been very industrious for the past few weeks.

Julia. Industrious is the right way to put it, Isabel; I certainly have been very busy. But when this pair of mittens and wristlets that I am making for Tom are finished, I can say I am through for this year.

Hazel. Have you made many presents this year, Julia?

Julia. Yes, quite a number of them, Hazel. I don't remember just how many, but I surely have been busy.

Hazel (teasingly, looking at Julia). I have heard say that it don't take much to keep some people busy. For instance, now, there is——

Julia (quickly). Now that's not me, Hazel, not at all. When I work, I work.

Isabel. So does a pump-handle, Julia. But then some one must take hold of it.

Julia. I see you girls just want to tease me. Well go ahead, I don't care.

(Enter Jessie, excitedly, laying aside her wraps.)

Hazel. Well, well! If here isn't the sluggard at last. We thought you were never, never, going to come. What detained you so long?

Jessie (flurried and excitedly). Oh, girls, you couldn't ever—ever guess. In a year's time you couldn't ever—ever—ever guess.

Isabel. An engine down on the railroad crossing?

Jessie. No!—No! *(Shaking her head.)*

Julia. Had to wait for your mother to fix your hair, or tie your hair ribbons?

Jessie. No! No! Oh, girls *(holding up hands in surprise)* just think of it! Jerusha Grumble was out sweeping off her walk as I came along and she looked up and smiled, and said just as pleasant as could be, "Good afternoon, Jessie." *(All the girls rise quickly and look at Jessie in astonishment.)*

Julia (drawls out). She d-i-d?

Jessie (nodding). U-m. Um—m.

Hazel (with emphasis). She—did—indeed?

Jessie—Um——. Um-m-m——

Isabel (more emphasis). Really—did she?

Jessie. Um—m. Why, girls, I was never so surprised in all my life. Jerusha Grumble never spoke so nice to me as she did to-day. I was so surprised that I really had to stop every few minutes to think about it. That is one reason why I am so late in coming here.

Hazel (girls take seats again). Well, this is a surprise, Jessie, to think Jerusha took the trouble to speak kindly to one of us girls. I don't think she would ever say good afternoon to me, for you know she has been very angry with me ever since I called her a cranky old maid.

Isabel. Dear me, Hazel, you ought not to have said that to her. Jerusha is cross, and awfully cranky, too, but perhaps there has been something in her life that has made her dislike every one. I heard father say once, that Jerusha had a sweetheart a long time ago, and that a girl named Hannah Takehim won him away from her, and Jerusha hasn't been like the same person since. But I really do wish she would be different.

Jessie. She must be getting different, or she wouldn't have spoken so nice to me to-day. Do you know, girls, what I was thinking of on my way here? It was just this. That we four be a committee to go down to see Jerusha, and invite her to go to the Christmas tree exercises to-morrow night. Let's try to get Jerusha out among the people of the village, and when she sees that we want to be friendly with her, perhaps she will be different.

Julia. As likely as not when she sees us come in her gate, she will get angry and meet us at the door with a broomstick.

Jessie. Never mind how mad she is, we'll pretend not to notice it, but all speak pleasantly to her, and gently push our way into the house.

Hazel. I am perfectly willing to go, because I would really like to see Jerusha live like other people, and not be such an unsociable old creature. Shall we all go girls? I will lead the way.

All. Yes, we will all go, Hazel.

Hazel. We'll all meet at my house to-morrow afternoon. *(All leave for home with goodbyes, etc.)*

Scene II.—*Sitting-room at Jerusha's home*

(Oil stove in one corner; ironing board in the other. Jerusha's large rocker at one side. Jerusha very busy.)

Jerusha. Well, Jerusha Grumble, you're getting awful tired, indeed you are. But my sakes, how happy you have been to-day. *(Seats herself in rocker.)* Here I am just touching on fifty-eight, and all along I've acted like sixty. That is, I've acted like some one sixty years old, and not exactly that either, because most people sixty years old act decent-like and get some enjoyment out of life. But I always was cross-like, leastwise ever since Hannah Takehim done what she did. But Hannah's dead now, and Jeremiah's a widower and most blind. Pshaw! them things are all passed now, and I am going to live like other folks. Dear me, you don't just know how good I did feel after I had said good afternoon to Jessie, yesterday. And how nice she did talk to me, and she said she hoped I would have a nice Christmas! And after she went on her way, I just thought to myself, Jerusha, just try and have a real nice Christmas once, and so I sets to work and made pie and cake, and molasses candy, and popcorn, and then I thought I would have a Christmas tree

all to myself. Only it ain't going to be a real tree, but just my new broom fixed up. When I was a little girl our poor dear mother used to fix up the broom on Christmas, and we children had lots of fun with it. You see we were very poor, and mother couldn't afford to buy a real tree, so we made the broom answer instead. They are going to have a real tree up at the church to-night and wouldn't I like to see it? If I was like other folks I would go up there. Yes, and I will go, too! Now I'll lay out that old print skirt, and when I get time I will press it. *(Lays out the things as she talks.)* And I'll fix my old bonnet over, and I'll darn the holes in my black gloves, and go to the Christmas tree to-night. Now I must write this all down or I will forget about it. *(Writes.)* There now! I'll fix up my own tree first before I do anything else. *(Stands the broom up near her rocker, fixed so that it can be easily knocked over.)* There, I guess that will do. It seems that the more I do to-day the happier I get. Now I'll put this popcorn trimming on—and this 'copia I'll put on, and yes, I'll just write Jessie's name on it, too. And this handkerchief is for Isabel. And this ribbon is for Julia. Wouldn't those girls laugh if they could see my Christmas tree and presents on it for them? But it ain't likely they will ever know that I was so foolish. I have always been so cross and cranky that no one ever comes here to see me, but I do mean to be different from now on. *(As she finishes fixing up the broom.)* There, that does look real nice. Now I will just sit down and look at it before I get things fixed up for to-night. *(Seats herself in chair and admires the tree.)* Jerusha Grumble, this has been your happiest Christmas since Hannah Takehim. . . . But as I said before, Hannah's dead now, and Jeremiah's a widower and most blind. *(Falls asleep in the chair. Chair placed so she cannot be seen from door. Girls knock at door. Jerusha does not waken. Girls open door a little and peep in, but do not see her.)*

Julia. Now Hazel, go in. You said that you would lead the way.

Hazel. Oh, supposing she gets mad and drives us away. You all know what a cross-patch Jerusha is.

Jessie. Well, girls, all call out, "Merry Christmas, Jerusha," and then walk right in and begin to admire everything she has.

Isabel. Knock once more on the inside of the door.

Hazel. Here goes! Are you ready?

Isabel. Yes, Hazel, do for pity's sake rap hard. Maybe she is upstairs.

Hazel (raises her hand to knock). Oh, girls, how can I?

Julia. You said you would, Hazel, now go ahead. Be quick!

Hazel. All ready, girls. *(Raps at the door; no answer. All laugh and giggle.)* She must be out or asleep. I'll rap again. *(Raps again and waits.)*

Jessie. She may be sick. Let's go right in. I'll lead the way if Hazel won't.

Hazel. Oh, do go Jessie, we will all follow you. *(All tiptoe in and find Jerusha asleep. Examine the tree and find the note Jerusha wrote.)*

Isabel. Poor Jerusha is trying to have a Christmas tree all to herself, and by the way this reminder reads, I should think she was going to fix up for a visit somewhere.

Jessie (who has examined the tree). Here is something for each of us on this broom Christmas tree! I wonder what it means, anyway. Perhaps Jerusha is trying to live a better life, and if so, then we girls must help her.

Julia (who has been examining the dress, bonnet and gloves). I say, girls, let's fix up these things while Jerusha is asleep, and perhaps it will please her, when she wakes up, to find her work all finished. I will mend the gloves, and Jessie, you fix up the bonnet, and Hazel can help you, while Isabel presses out the skirt. Now all work quietly and fast, for she may soon wake up. *(All get to work.)*

Isabel (admires the skirt, which is of very loud or gay pattern). I guess Jerusha's grandmother must have worn this dress. It's most loud enough to wake Jerusha out of her sleep. I wonder how long it has been in the family? *(Here Isabel drops the iron on the floor. All frightened. Jessie places forefinger on her lips. Hazel stands up with one hand over her mouth and holding bonnet by one string. Isabel holds up both hands and one foot. Julia, very much frightened, looks at sleeping Jerusha.)*

Isabel. My! but I nearly did it that time, girls. Jerusha is a good sleeper. I'll be more careful this time. *(Goes on with ironing.)*

Hazel. I would put that feather in this way, Jessie, if I were doing it.
Jessie. I think this is the best way, Hazel. Just see how graceful it is! *(Holding up the bonnet.)*

Julia. My job is done. How about you, Isabel, is that dress pressed out yet? Oh, how I would like to see you in a dress like that. Do put it on, Isabel, do now. just for fun.

Isabel. What if Jerusha should wake up and catch me with her dress on? She would be awfully angry. No—no, I can't do it.

Hazel. Oh, do put it on, Isabel, and the bonnet, too. We will be as quiet as mice, and Jerusha won't know a thing about it. Come, we will help you with it.

Isabel. Well, if you all keep very quiet, I will see how it fits me. *(Puts on the dress and bonnet.)*

Julia. Oh, what a picture you are, Isabel. Just turn around so we can see you. How sweet you look. Great grandmother, Isabel. *(All laugh and have a good time as Isabel walks around the room. Finally some one knocks the broom over on Jerusha, who wakes up with a start.)*

Jerusha. Mercy me, what does this mean? Where did you all come from? Who are you all? Oh, I know you, Hazel! You who called me a cranky old maid! *(Grabs the broom to threaten Hazel.)*

Hazel (very much frightened). Now don't use your broom on me, Jerusha. Please don't. You had it all fixed up for a Christmas tree, and had presents on it for each of us, and now will you use it to drive us out of the house.

Jessie (soothingly to Jerusha, placing hand on her shoulder). Dear Jerusha, let me explain it all to you. You see we girls came here to spend the afternoon with you, and we knocked and knocked at the door, and as you did not answer, we thought that you were sick in bed. So we came right in and found you asleep, and you looked so tired we thought that we would let you sleep on, while we fixed up the things you had laid out for repairs. Now please don't be angry with us, dear.

Jerusha (spies Isabel in the corner with her dress and bonnet on). Isabel, what are you doing with my dress on? And I declare, but you have my bonnet, too!

Isabel (timidly). Oh, Jerusha, after we got them all fixed up, we thought we would like to see how they would look. *(Admiringly.)* Really, dear

Jerusha, this is a beautiful dress. You don't see any like it nowadays, do you, girls? No Jerusha, we meant no offence, so you'll excuse us, won't you?

Julia. No, Jerusha, we meant no harm. But do please sit down *(leads her to chair)*, and tell us how you came to make a Christmas tree out of your broom. And why did you put presents on it for us girls? You must have had a reason for doing it.

Jerusha (sits down, wipes tears from eyes. Julia sits beside her.) Dear me, girls, I am real glad that you have come, even if you did find me doing foolish things. But really I ain't been so happy on Christmas before, since Hannah Takehim done what she did. But pshaw, Hannah's dead now these twenty years, and Jeremiah's still a widower, but most blind. But you want to know about the broom Christmas tree, and I will tell you. You see, when I was a little girl we lived in the city, and we were always very poor, and when Christmas came we always wanted a tree. But our mother, with six children, never could afford to buy one for us. So we always dressed up the broom for a Christmas tree, and what fun we did have! A few days ago, as I sat by the window, I saw some men go by with a great big tree for the church, and I thinks to myself, Jerusha, wouldn't you like to go to a Christmas exercise once more? And I said "yes" to myself. But then I thought how mean I had always been to every one, ever since Hannah Takehim done what she did. But pshaw, Hannah's dead this many a year, and Jeremiah's still a widower. Still, I says to myself, Jerusha, you must do different, and I just made up my mind that I will be different, and I will speak pleasant-like to people, and I would go where the neighbors were, and up to the Christmas tree I thought was just the place to begin.

Hazel. Yes, Jerusha, that will be nice and brave of you to come up to the Christmas exercises to-night, and one of the reasons why we came here was to ask you to go up to the church with us. We expect to have a splendid time. You will come with us, won't you, Jerusha?

Jerusha. I think it is real nice of you, Hazel, to invite me to go, much nicer than to call me a cranky old maid. *(Jerusha reaches for her handkerchief. Hazel thinks she is reaching for the broom and starts for the door.)* Don't be afraid, Hazel, no, no, don't be afraid. I know I was cranky and mean, but I wouldn't be an old maid if Hannah Takehim hadn't done what she did. But pshaw——

Julia. Jerusha, you haven't said that you would go with us to the exercises to-night. We girls would dearly love to have you go. You will meet a lot of people there that you know.

Jerusha. Yes, and a lot that I never liked and who never liked Jerusha Grumble, either.

Isabel. But Jerusha that is just the place to become good friends. You know that Christmas was the time that the angels sang, "Peace on earth, good-will toward men." Now let us make it peace right here in our own village. You must know Mr. Coutant, and Mr. Bennett and Mr. Macdonald.

Jerusha. Oh, yes, I know all them. Mr. Macdonald is superintendent of the Sunday-school, ain't he, Jessie?

Jessie. Yes, my father is the superintendent of the Sunday-school.

Jerusha. Well, your father is 'most old enough to remember what Hannah Takehim did. But, oh, pshaw! Hannah's dead these twenty years, and Jeremiah's a widower still, and most blind. And I am just touching on fifty-eight, so your father will remember. It's no wonder I am a cranky old maid. *(Hazel starts up again.)*

Jessie. Let us all meet at my house, and go up together. I know that every one will try to make it pleasant for you, Jerusha. We will tell all our friends that you are coming to the exercises, and they won't be surprised when they see you.

Hazel. And I know that some young ladies will have a little present on the tree for you to prove that they appreciate your coming.

Isabel (putting on her wraps). Please don't fix up too much, Jerusha, for we are all plain people up there and we don't put on any airs.

Jerusha. No, no, I won't fix up much. I may wear the things you girls so kindly fixed up for me, and again I may wear my first best ones.

Julia (all should now have wraps on to go home). Girls, let's sing a Christmas song for Jerusha before we start for home. *(All stand in line, join hands and swing them back and forth child-fashion, while they sing a verse of some familiar Christmas song. At the second verse, Jerusha takes her place in the middle of the line and sings and swings with the girls.)*

Jerusha (near close of second verse says). If only Hannah Takehim could see me now! But pshaw——

Jessie. Merry Christmas, Jerusha. Now be on time. *(All say, "Merry Christmas.")*

Jerusha (as the girls are leaving). I'll be there on time, don't fear. *(Speaking to the audience.)* Now ain't this been just splendid? And ain't those young girls just lovely? I don't think that Hazel will ever call me a cranky old maid again. And I do just hope that Jeremiah will be at the Christmas tree exercises. I'll just show him that Jerusha Grumble can go out in society even if I am touching on fifty-eight and an old maid, which *he* knows I wouldn't be if Hannah Takehim hadn't done what she did. But pshaw! I must get ready for the Christmas tree or I will be late, and I think after all that I will wear my first best clothes, and look real pert—perter than Hannah—but pshaw!

EXIT

(If used at the close of a Christmas exercise, have the girls and Jerusha come up the aisle of the church or hall sometime during the distribution of the presents. Jerusha should then be dressed in her "first best clothes.")

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